

Health council, man resolve 1986 complaint

By Sharon Kirkey

Citizen staff writer

The regional district health council and an Ottawa man Monday agreed to an Ontario Human Rights settlement, resolving a complaint filed by the man in 1986 against the council.

The settlement includes plans for a workshop to educate doctors, public health officials and community groups about environmental hypersensitivity.

The spring workshop will be organized by the council.

Chris Brown, a 39-year-old freelance journalist who suffers from environmental hypersensitivity, accused the council of discriminating against him on the basis of handicap.

Environmental hypersensitivity — dubbed the 20th century disease — is a condition in which people become sensitive to substances in modern life such as chemicals, synthetic materials, plastic, car exhaust, cigarette smoke and most food that isn't free of additives.

Symptoms range from headaches and temporary loss of muscle control to confusion and disorientation. Some victims develop such a severe reaction to their environment, it disrupts their lives and leaves them physically and mentally disabled.

Brown, a spokesman for Canadians Disabled by Pollution, said the council refused to meet with him when he approached them

about the lack of health-care services for victims of the debilitating disease. He estimates about 350 families in the Ottawa area have at least one member with the illness.

Under the provincial human rights settlement, the district health council has agreed to recognize environmental hypersensitivity as a "disabling, physical condition" and will take steps to address "inequities which may have existed in the community" in terms of services for sufferers.

"We will look at constructive way to help people in the community deal with this disease," said council chairman Gayle Mullington.